

Sweetwater County Jail  
Grant Street, South side of Willow Creek  
South Pass City  
Fremont County  
Wyoming

HABS No. WYO-50

HABS  
WYO,  
7-SOPAC,  
23-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
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Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20005

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. WYO-50

## SWEETWATER COUNTY JAIL

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Location: Grant Street on the south side of Willow Creek, South Pass City, Fremont County, Wyoming.  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: (USGS South Pass City Quadrangle Map) 12.680760.4703840.

Present Owner: State of Wyoming.

Present Occupant: None.

Present Use: Preserved as an historic building by Wyoming Recreation Commission.

Statement of Significance: This is a sturdy building and an excellent example of an 1870's frontier jail.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1870.
2. Architect: The jail was probably designed by John Swingle. He was one of the County Commissioners and his brother, Jacob Swingle, was the contractor whose bid for the construction of the jail was accepted. He was also the owner of the Miner's Exchange Saloon and a maker of burial coffins.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of property: Lot 51 on Grant Street, South Pass City, Fremont County, Wyoming.

(Note: For further information on land ownership in South Pass City see the HABS Report on South Pass City, WYO-27.) Sweetwater County of Wyoming Territory was organized in 1870 and Acting Governor Edward M. Lee appointed John W. Anthony, Nathaniel Daniels, and John Swingle as County Commissioners. Immediately, the County Commissioners drafted specifications for a jail and advertised for bids to build the jail. On February 2, 1870, Swingle and Daniels were appointed to secure a lot for the jail. Bids for the jail house were opened on February 14, 1870 and the contract was awarded to Jacob Swingle and O. J. Smith. They agreed to furnish all building

materials and to erect the jail for two thousand dollars. By April 1, 1870, the building was completed and approved by the County Commissioners. Swingle and Smith received ten dollars extra for placing two iron rings in the floor of each cell which were not called for in the original specifications.

The jail, along with the town, was bought by Fred Stratton, Sr. in 1949 for \$8,000. He sold it to Mr. and Mrs. John Woodring in 1955. In turn, the Woodrings sold the town to the Wyoming 75th Anniversary Commission, Inc. in 1966. The 1967 Wyoming legislature created the Old South Pass Historical Preserve to take care of the city. In 1969, the legislature turned over operation and maintenance of South Pass City to the Wyoming Recreation Commission.

4. Alterations and additions: By July of 1870, the jail was in need of repair and Swingle and Smith were given a contract for \$145 to raise the jail building and to place a stone foundation under it. This foundation was to be sunk two feet below the ground and was to be two feet thick. Two years later, July 9, 1872, E. B. Cheney was instructed to procure logs and put a floor in the jail. It seems possible that at this time a second room was added to the jail for the HABS team confirmed the absence of a stone foundation under the exterior walls of the south (front) room.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The jail was the first one for Sweetwater County and though Butch Cassidy and Calamity Jane had visited South Pass City, there is no evidence to suggest that either were incarcerated in the jail. There are no reports of any escapes from the jail.

In the early 1880's following one of the numerous fires at South Pass City, the outer room of the jail was temporarily used as a school house until a new one was built.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Photographic file, Wyoming Recreation Commission, Cheyenne, Wyoming.
2. Bibliography:
  - a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Carter County, Records of Carter County, Dakota Territory.  
Western History Research Center, Coe Library, Laramie,  
Wyoming.

Sweetwater County, Records of County Commissioners of  
Sweetwater County, Volume I, Sweetwater County  
Courthouse, Green River, Wyoming.

Trevor, Marjorie C., "History of Carter-Sweetwater County,  
Wyoming to 1875." Master's thesis, University of  
Wyoming, 1954.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Muths, Thomas. Restoration Master Plan, South Pass City,  
Wyoming. Jackson, Wyoming: Design Associates, 1972.

South Pass News. April 9, 1870 and August 31, 1870 Micro-  
film, University of Wyoming Library.

Prepared by John Paige  
Project Historian  
National Park Service  
Summer, 1973

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This structure is a good example of the very sturdy construction of a 19th Century frontier jail.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This one-story, rectangular structure is approximately 20'-5" by 33'-8". The long sides of the building are broken into two unequal bays.
2. Foundations: The north (cell) part of the building is placed on a randomly laid foundation of local red slate shist. The south (front) part of the building has no foundation.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The entire exterior is constructed of hand-hewn lodgepole pine logs, gathered locally, which are unfinished. There is no evidence of chinking between the horizontal joints of the logs. This

is perhaps due to the unique interior wall construction developed to accommodate the security needs of the jail.

4. Structural system, framing: The logs serve as bearing members with the roof logs resting on the side wall logs.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: A single doorway is centered in the south (front) wall. The door consists of two thicknesses of 1" x 8" tongue and groove planking with joints running vertical on the exterior face and horizontal on the interior face.
  - b. Windows and shutters: There are two window openings. They are located on each side of the south (front) entrance door. They are unglazed openings with recently added 1/2" x 12" steel strap bars (three bars vertically at 18" on center and 10 bars horizontally at 6" on center.
6. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gable roof of overlapping rough sawn boards spanning from ridge to side wall.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: This one story building consists of an office room at the front. Behind the office is the jailer's room which is the entire width of the building and from which the four cells may be entered. These cells are located at the extreme rear of the building.
2. Stairways: None.
3. Flooring: Random width 2" wood planking laid directly on grade.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are finished with white-washed wooden planks. The walls in the front room are 1" random width boards, and there is no finished ceiling. The walls and ceiling in the center room and rear cells are rough 2" x 4" boards nailed to each other to form a solid wooden wall and ceiling. The walls are then secured to the interior face of the exterior logs.
5. Doorways and doors: The center doorway from the front office to the jailer's room and the doors into each cell are all con-

structed of a series of 2" x 4" boards nailed to each other in a manner similar to that of the interior walls. There is a barred opening in each of the cell doors. The middle door in the northeast corner is missing.

6. Trim: None.

7. Hardware: The security hardware appears to be hand forged iron bars 1/2" x 2" used as hinges and as locks. The bars in the cell door windows and in two windows on either side of the main entrance are 7/8" round iron set into the center thickness of the wall and extending through into the head and sill. They are of undetermined length.

8. Mechanical equipment and lighting: None.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The jail is located on the south side of Willow Creek and faces south near what was originally the south center part of town.

Prepared by J. William Rudd  
Architect  
Project Supervisor  
National Park Service  
Summer, 1973

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during the 1973 Wyoming Project undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Wyoming Recreation Commission. During the project, records were made on twenty-eight (28) individual subjects and six (6) historic areas.

This project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor was Professor J. William Rudd, Architect, of the University of Cincinnati. Project Historian was John Paige, Oklahoma State University. The measured drawings were prepared by John Uhlir, University of California at Berkeley, Architect; and Student Assistant Architects Richard Duflocq, University of Cincinnati, Clayton Fraser, University of Tennessee, and Richard Wyatt, California Polytechnic University at San Luis Obispo. Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, provided the photographic record. This report was edited for HABS in 1977 by Candace Reed.

**ADDENDUM TO:**

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